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ABSTRACT

A study explored rhetorical strategies and dynamics within a single speech delivered by Frederick Douglass on July 5, 1852 in Rochester, New York, which was considered by speaker and audience to be an Independence Day speech. An examination of the text suggests that Douglass embarked on a strategy of attention-shifting--turning the attention of the audience from an issue or belief to ideas that subsume the original issue. In an elaborate introductory section, Douglass shifted the attention of his audience from national celebration (on July 4th) to national mourning for Negro slavery. He then focused closely on the condition of the slaves at the time, and having established that, Douglass shifted attention from slavery as a regional problem to a national shame. Throughout these attention-shifts Douglass wove a thread of principle which united the entire message: the principle of true liberty. The attention-shift that provides insights into the inner workings of this particular discourse could become a paradigm of what is possible in a discourse, serving as an exemplary case which functions as a standard of evaluation, allowing the critic to see what a discourse can and ought to do and serving to judge other similar discourses. (NH)

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ATTENTION-SHIFTING IN FREDERICK DOUGLASS

by

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INTRODUCTION

This study pursues the task of exploring rhetorical strategies and dynamics within a single speech. Despite the rather parochial sounding nature of this task, I believe ample justification can be found for this project and for its usefulness to rhetorical criticism of public moral argument. What is attempted here is in harmony with Lefr's recent call for more serious studies in "textual criticism."[1] Such studies yield an account of the rhetorical dynamics implicit within the text. Besides identifying significant features in the text and explaining the interactions among those features, such an enterprise can yield what E.D. Hirsch calls "theoretical understanding of the particular case."[2] Lefr's particular interest is in how the operating concepts of time and space interact within the speech. Yet to be shown is how such work, which places renewed attention upon the artistic qualities of the text (and their integration with the functional characteristics) can produce other theoretical insights and paradigms. I believe this particular study offers potential for exploring many interesting questions such as: Can there be multiple purposes for a single speech? When can a speaker successfully "violate" audience expectations? Where does identification of a particular genre become confusing or counter-productive to the analysis of a text? Just how much does the rhetorical situation "determine" the strategy, purpose, outcome of a speech? These and other questions cannot be answered without serious textual analysis.

The thesis of this paper is that Douglass embarked on a strategy of attention-shifting in his July 5, 1852, speech. By attention-shifting I mean

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turning the attention of an audience from an issue or belief (perhaps even from the setting) to ideas that subsume the original issues. I draw upon the notion of attention-shifting from Brown, who explains the concept of attention-switch as a visual gestalt shift.[3] Brown reminds us that such a concept requires that 1). two patterns always be potentially involved in our sizing up a situation, 2). each pattern itself be capable of rendering the situation coherently, and 3). movement from one to the other, with a consequent reconstituting of the situation--before a switch will have occurred.[4] Brown builds upon Black's concept of argumentative synthesis as a means of Burkean transcendence.[5] My adaptation of these ideas and the incorporation of Perelman's dissociative arguments is a modification of these scholars' ideas.

An examination of the text of the address develops my thesis along the following lines: In an elaborate introductory section Douglass shifts the attention of his audience from national celebration (on July 4th) to national mourning for Negro slavery; following that, attention is shifted to focus closely on the present condition of the slaves; having established that, the speaker shifts attention from slavery as a regional problem to a national shame. Throughout these attention-shifts Douglass weaves a thread of principle which unifies the entire message: the principle of true liberty.

RHETORICAL SITUATION OF THE SPEECH

The speech was delivered on July 5, 1852, in Rochester, New York. For practical purposes it was considered by speaker and audience (and will be for analysis) to be a July 4th (Independence Day) speech. The speaker was Frederick Douglass, former slave who became a renowned orator for the anti-slavery movement.[6] Rochester had been Douglass's home base since 1847, and he had delivered adresses in Corinthian Hall many times before. Less than eighteen months earlier Douglass had given a series of lectures there on slavery. Moreover, Rochester was the publishing site of Douglass's newspaper. Therefore the city had had multiple opportunities to be acquainted with the anti-slavery cause. Yet to what extent the plight of the American Negro and the fact of American slavery were causes for concern (if not support) among the citizens present on that July day in 1852 is problematic. We learn that Douglass himself in those 1850-51 lectures was skeptical about widespread sympathy for the anti-slavery cause:

> By some who hear me, these propositions will be, perhaps, regarded as far too tame for the basis of a lecture on slavery at this exciting period. But I would beg such persons to remember that they are the few, not the many; and that being the exception, they afford no criterion for the course I ought to pursue on the present occasion. By them, the anti-slavery alphabet was learned perhaps twenty years ago; but the greatness of the American people, I am sorry to say, have that simple lesson yet to learn.[7]

Rochester, New York, had been a hotbed of anti-slavery activity up to 1850. Being the termination of the Underground Railroad, hundreds of runaway slaves poured into the city, slaves needing shelter and help to escape. That situation changed drastically following passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, so that many Negroes were too terrified to attend public meetings, and

in October, 1851, Douglass claimed that the population ratio of Rochester was one fugitive to one-thousand white citizens. Slave catching was still being advocated in the city, however, at that time. When Douglass delivered his 1850-51 lectures he was convinced that the prevailing feeling was that only "men hardened in the most atrocious and villainous crimes" had any involvement with slavery.[8]

Two other pertinent issues were current around the time of Douglass's speech. Douglass had been under increasing suspicion by other Abolitionists for 1). his changed position on the Constitution, 2). the charge that his newspaper was not clearly anti-slavery, but political. Beyond this a public scandal had arisen in 1852 regarding Douglass's affiliation with Julia Griffiths, a white woman active in the movement in Rochester. No trace of this issue, however, can be found in the speech.

Beyond the general ideas suggested above, however, our task is not to determine the exact nature of Douglass's rhetorical purpose for the speech, but to consider his strategies in that address. And we can be quite sure that those strategies serve the anti-slavery cause.

ANALYSIS OF THE SPEECH

Introductory Section of the Speech

In the lengthy introductory section (essentially the first one-third of the speech) Douglass prepares his audience for some of the attention-shifts he will make. One major way he does that is by contrasting the apparent to the real. Normally, reality is perceived through appearances that are taken as signs referring to it.[9] As long as we have no reason to doubt it, appearance is simply the aspect under which reality is presented to us, and we mean by appearance the manifestation of the real.[10] When, however, appearances are incompatible (like a straight oar out of water, which appears bent in the water), we must admit that some appearances are illusory and may lead us into error regarding the real.[11] Appearances which are deceptive can then be separated (dissociated) from those that correspond to reality.[12] Here dissociation on the theoretical level leads to a solution that will be valid for the future, because, by remodeling our conception of reality it prevents the reappearance of the same incompatibility.[13] Dissociation is the classical solution for incompatibilities that call for an alteration of conventional ways of thinking.[14] The distance between what is purportedly apparent to the audience and what is real for the speaker is what Douglass uses to develop a strategy whereby he can help his audience observe the real. That strategy involves the use of dissociative arguments which Douglass offers in this section.

The opening remarks invite audience attention to the speaker's own nervousness: He has an appearance of being at ease, but in reality he is nervous ("a quailing senation," "a shrinking," a distrust of his ability, a feeling of being inadequate to the task). Why is he nervous? Is it the

audience? (He has spoken to many of them before). Is it the hall? (He says he "has perfect gage of it"). Then might it be the occasion? The papers and placards say he is to deliver a 4th of July oration (which "sounds large"). That is the appearance; the reality is that Douglass is embarrassed to be present. The occasion requires him to consider who he is (including what he was) in light of July 4th. Expressing this disparity (incompatibility) between appearance and reality as distance from plantation to platform, Douglass openly contemplates something his audience cannot--the difficulty in getting from plantation to platform. The difficulty of this distance has yet to be traversed by so many still in slavery. The dissociation he has created works to develop distance between speaker and audience, and the distance is expressed along different dimensions, starting with the disjunction between his feelings and their perceptions of him, and it ends with the metaphorical space (social) between plantation and platform. The reality of that distance is what Douglass must make apparent (consistent with reality) to this audience on this day, a day which makes that task more difficult. Thus, July 4th is their celebration, not his.

Along with the dissociative arguments (appearance/reality), Douglass's grammar shows his attention-shifting from speaker to audience (rather, from himself to their celebration). The first three paragraphs are dominated by first person singular pronouns. These are then followed by three paragraphs containing mostly second person pronouns.[15] Substantively and stylistically, then, Douglass has acknowledged and exploited a gap.

Having called attention to that distance between speaker and audience, Douglass then moves to close the gap. He affirms the national celebration, the wisdom of the fathers, and the understanding that despite his differences with national conditions and policy, a nation so young is understandably prone

to mistakes, yet is "impressible" because of her youth. Thus having ingratiated his audience, Douglass resumes widening the gap between apparent and real. The July 4th celebration, then, is worthy of joyous remembrance (appearance), but it ought to be based upon the correct set of descriptions (reality). Britain's tyranny merely made the Colonies still more stubborn. Rather than bringing them to submission, tyranny brought rebellion, one which eventually succeeded in throwing off completely the yoke of oppression. Reality, according to Douglass, can be best observed by appreciating America's present position (1852) as analogous to Britain's position (1776). By stressing the wisdom of the fathers and the blindness of Britain, Douglass is plowing ground whereby later in the speech he can more directly warn his audience to beware of going the way of Britain (regarding the Colonies' independence).

Yet this strategy is still a backward look, justifying the reality in the historical past. Douglass believes he can find in the very paradox of July 4th (celebration of liberty in the midst of rampant slavery) the very principles of liberty. These principles are in one sense "timeless," i.e., true and applicable for more than one historical setting, yet not timeless in the popular abuse often mistaken for the real thing. Present distortion of the principles of liberty involves clinging to the easy, conservative way and refusing to change when change is called for (i.e., when injustice is present). The real principle of liberty looks not back at accomplishment but ahead to challenge. Liberty can never be "satisfied," especially when those who have it refuse to look elsewhere upon those who do not.

Douglass is setting more attention-shifts for his audience. He asks them to view the panorama of their nation's historical experience from their present vantage point (they cannot do otherwise, i.e., go back or change

places), but to scan a different view. A new focus brings in a startlingly new picture, one not seen without a rhetorical "experience," which Douglass will provide. Douglass can prepare for this attention-shift by affirming the present celebration of his audience, for that celebration provides a springboard for a shift toward the present (reality):

> Citizens, your fathers made good that resolution. They succeeded; and today you reap the fruits of that success. The freedom gained is yours; and you, therefore, may properly celebrate this anniversary. The 4th of July is the first great fact in your nation's history--the very ringbolt in the chain of your yet undeveloped destiny.[18]

And that future, Douglass promises, will be rough if his warnings are not heeded:

> From the round top of your ship of state, dark and threatening clouds may be seen. Heavy billows, like mountains in the distance disclose to the leeward huge forms of flinty rocks! That bolt drawn, that chain broken, and all is lost. Cling to this day,--cling to it, and to its principles, with the grasp of a storm-tossed mariner to a spar at midnight.[19]

The "principles" (of "this day," of the Declaration of Independence) are the object which has gone out of focus for the present audience. This is what Douglass seems to want to change with his attention-shifts.

However, Douglass is not yet ready to abandon the backward look--to the fathers. What his audience should cling to are not the easy (distorted) appearances but the difficult realities. Though it appears easy to see and to say (now--1852) that England was wrong in its oppression, it was in reality not at all easy or popular (back then--1776). Challenging a popular conception of reality never is. With some family metaphors ("home government," "fatherland," "parental prerogatives," "colonial children") Douglass shows the original close relationship of the Colonies' dependence upon Britain. He again dissociates the appearance from reality, erecting a wall of separation between popular attitudes and the historical realities upon which people have based them. The failure to see the risk and daring of the

fathers' willingness to criticize their own situation is wrong. The fathers had the tenacity often lacked today. "Their solid manhood stands out the more as we contrast it with these degenerate times."[18] This tenacity is the ability to look beyond the passing moment to the distant future, to envision change. This change is the eternal principle which effects freedom from bondage.

For Douglass the present day is replete with reminders of celebration--work halts, bells ring, banners fly. There is ample evidence that many Americans are familiar with the real causes of celebration. The words have been told and retold. In fact, it is a trademark of America that whatever enhances her wealth and reputation and can be had cheaply will be found by Americans. Here Douglass argues that the potential to understand the past is there. Anyone can know.

Therefore, Douglass begins a transition to another attention-shift. As he does this he will draw out the backward look at appearance/reality and frame the beginning of his more direct challenge: The look back is valuable only for its use to the present. We have no right to enjoy a child's share in the labor of our fathers unless our children are to be blest by our labors. "You have no right to wear out and waste the hard-earned fame of your fathers to cover your indolence."[19]

With the themes of degeneracy, lack of tenacity, and indolence suggested, Douglass uses two biblical analogies to heighten the disparity upon which he has been drawing: 1). Men everywhere today are committing the same empty, hypocritical boast of ancient Israel, "We have Washington to our father."[20] Washington freed all his slaves, but others after him have not. The charge is clear: Douglass is arguing that the principles of liberty, recognized and practiced by Washington (and the fathers), have been neglected by contemporary

America. The claims to heritage of liberty and the celebration for liberty are thereby hollow.[21] Just as John the Baptist had shocked Israel, claiming that God could raise up stones as children (Matt. 3:9), likewise this present generation (Douglass implies) has no inherent right to claim Washington as father. 2). A second analogy applies not to America but to the slaves: Just as Negro slaves were earlier likened to Israel at the Exodus and July 4th to Passover (fourth paragraph of speech), this analogy in this section welds the passage to the following section on the condition of the slaves. Here Negroes are compared with the exiled Israelites in Babylon who, when commanded by their captors to rejoice, could only mourn.[22] Thus Douglass has usurped the Promised Land from under the Americans' feet. The role of Chosen People, then, belongs to captive slaves, and America is cast as oppressor:

> I say it with a sad sense of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common.--The sunlight that brought light and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice. I must mourn.[23]

Disparity is not merely between speaker and audience, however. It is more fundamental than that. The distance between you/yours and I/mine is about to be developed in the following section. Douglass, then, stands as synecdochal representative of the whole Negro slave people.

To summarize, Douglass has laid a foundation in this introductory part of the speech. By shifting attention from a day of national celebration to a case for national mourning, he is then ready to look closely at the plight of the slaves. By emphasizing the distance between himself and the audience, and through backward looks at the historical basis for independence, Douglass has shown a disparity between apparent and real. He has respected the closeness to his audience and affirmed their beliefs when he could. He also would

rejoice if he could (anyone would), but he cannot. And that is what must next be faced.

Condition of the Slaves

It is no small task to attempt to shift the attention of an audience, and for Douglass this is no exception. The more proficient Douglass became as an orator, the more difficult it became for some to believe that this was indeed a former slave. As early as 1841 Stephen S. Foster had warned the rising star of the anti-slavery speaking circuit that his eloquence was a barrier to his credence as an uneducated former slave.[24] In 1844 a correspondent expressed some of those predicted doubts in print.[25] In 1845 Douglass openly published his own story, the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass.[26] Scorning the safety of pseudonymity meant that subsequent to publication of the book, open public speaking presented an ever-present possibilty of capture and return to his former master.[27]

However, Douglass strongly relied upon the power of words, especially moral argument through speech and print, to convict his audiences of the truth and urgency of the anti-slavery cause. He appeared determined, in spite of risks to self and family, regardless of any barriers it might present, to denounce as well as to narrate, to argue as forcefully as he knew. In the second section of the speech Douglass argues that the rights and grievances of the slaves were so obvious, so plain, that argument was unnecessary. Yet argue he did. His argument consisted largely of leading the audience on a tour, an audible, visible display of the Negroes' plight. It will be plain for all to witness, even on this day:

> Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command,

everything that serves to perpetuate slavery--the great sin and shame of America! I will not equivocate; I will not excuse; I will use the severest language I can command; and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose judgment is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slaveholder, shall not confess to be right and just.[28]

What we should note firstly in the remarks quoted above is how they prefigure most of what Douglass does in this and the next section of the speech. Slavery is denounced as crime and as sin, according to the criteria of judgment--namely, the Bible and the Constitution, God and the world. In arguments he says are virtually unnecessary because they are so obvious, Douglass concludes that the slave is a man, that as a man he is entitled to liberty, that slavery is wrong, cruel, and contrary to God. Though these claims are bold and assertive in their directness and force (far more forceful than his lengthy beginning), thus far Douglass is restrained in tone, offering substantive argument without directly confronting his audience:

> How should I look today, in the presence of Americans, dividing, and subdividing a discourse, to show that men have a natural right to freedom? speaking of it relatively and positively, negatively and affirmatively. To do so, would be to make myself ridiculous, and to offer an insult to your understanding.--There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven that does not know that slavery is wrong for him.[29]

The second thing that we note about Douglass's earlier pledge to denounce and to forego further "debate," is that his denunciations are often invitations to see and hear for oneself:

> Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.[30]

The display tour of the American slave market is a sensory experience for the observer in Douglass's audience:

> Behold... you will see.... I will show you.... Mark the sad procession.... Hear his savage yells.... There, see the old man.... Cast one glance.... See, too.... Suddenly! you hear.... your ears are

saluted.... The crack you heard.... Follow this drove.... Attend the auction.... Tell me, citizens, where, under the sun, you can witness a spectacle more fiendish and shocking. Yet this is but a glance at the American slave-trade, as it exists, at this moment, in the ruling part of the United States.[31]

By importing such sights and sounds to the audience Douglass has allowed his audience to see and hear what he has seen and heard. He was born amid those circumstances--not as observer but as participant. Sharing his memories now allows the audience to consider his experience:

> Fellow citizens, this murderous traffic is, today, in active operation in this boasted republic. In the solitude of my spirit I see clouds of dust raised on the highways of the South; I see the bleeding footsteps; I hear the doleful wail of fettered humanity on the way to the slave-markets, where the victims are to be sold like horses, sheep, and swine, knocked off to the highest bidder. There I see the tenderest ties ruthlessly broken, to gratify the lust, caprice and rapacity of the buyers and sellers of men. My soul sickens at the sight.
>
> Is this the land your Fathers loved
> The freedom which they toiled to win?
> Is this the earth whereon they moved?
> Are these the graves they slumber in?[32]

The poem poses for conscious consideration the possible realities suggested by Douglass's attention-shifts. It calls for decision through direct confrontation (rhetorical questions--"Is this?" "are these?"), asking the audience to honestly assess now the developed dissociation between apparent and real.

We have discussed the attention-shift from celebration to mourning through seeing and hearing the physical and emotional plight of the slaves, a plight still unheeded on the very day of celebration. These are moral arguments grounded in the motivational appeals to humanitarian concerns of all men. Note the individual, existential appeal ("There is not a man... that does not know that slavery is wrong for him.") and the intersubjective, social appeal ("Fellow citizens...."). The concern is not over economics or constitutionality but for suffering. Douglass began by questioning the

apparent and calling up the real concerning the past (fathers). He challenged his audience to consider the (real) past, lest their children lose their right to the future because their parents neglected their responsibilities to the present.

National Issues

In the third section of the speech Douglass turns from the condition of the slaves (and what that condition reveals about the nation) to the condition of the country (in more explicit terms). He expands his case to include Congress, Church, and Constitution. Having described the physical, emotional, psychological, and moral evils of slavery, Douglass has yet pointed no accusing finger of responsibility. Descriptions have pertained to the South or northern areas outside New York. Now slavery becomes more than a regional ill; through legal obliteration of the Mason-Dixon line, slavery becomes a national disgrace. The Fugitive Slave Law has brought responsibility on all United States citizens to report runaway slaves. Bribery of judges is sanctioned; the legal process for witnesses whereby Negroes cannot testify in court is the rule. This law is the scandal of the globe, and Douglass wants that news published. This day (July 4th) is no day of liberty; injustice (slavery) reigns in the United States:

> His own testimony is nothing. He can bring no witnesses for himself. The minister of American justice is bound by the law to hear but one side; and that side is the side of the oppressor. Let this damning fact be perpetually told. Let it be thundered around the world that in tyrant-killing, king-hating, people-loving, democratic, Christian America the seats of justice are filled with judges who hold their offices under an open and palpable bribe, and are bound, in deciding the case of man's liberty, to hear only his accusers![33]

Three consecutive, compound participles describe America in the final sentence above, collectively calling attention to a great disparity between an apparent basis for pride and celebration and what is for Douglass cause for shame and

mourning. The audience is led to shift its attention from national pride to national shame.

Persisting with the premise of the Fugitive Slave Law, Douglass adjusts the attention from American politics to American religion. The (Fugitive Slave) law is both unjust and unchristian. Moreover, the indifference of the Church to that law is likened to that of the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus's day, who were scrupulous to tithe mint, anise, and cummin yet omitted weightier matters of law, judgment, mercy, and faith.[34] His charge of indifference against the American Church on this day of celebration is founded on Douglass's hypothetical example. He claims that if the law were to restrict religious forms of worship, the Church would rise up in revolt (as in Scotland in the days of John Knox). If that possibility (as premise) is granted, then the Church could be indicted for sins of omission (neglect of weightier matters--ministry to the needy) and of commission (scrupulous attention to minutiae). The disjunction drawn by Douglass (and St. Matthew) is between form and substance:

> The fact that the church of our country (with fractional exceptions) does not esteem 'the Fugitive Slave Law' as a declaration of war against religious liberty, implies that the church regards religion as a form of worship, an empty ceremony, and <u>not</u> a vital principle, requiring active benevolence, justice, love, and good will towards man.[35]

However, the Church is not merely indifferent; it is sympathetic to slavery, preaching its merits! This kind of church is an abomination to God. Its worship is not only vain but blasphemous. Douglass here takes aim against many of religion's "Most eloquent Divines," who taught that slavery was sanctioned by the Bible. Douglass decries such religion and claims open atheism is preferable to the gospel "<u>as preached by those Divines</u>." Such religion is "a cold and flinty-hearted thing, having neither principles of right action nor bowels of compassion."[36] Douglass quotes the Epistle of

James as he further cultivates the contrast between pure and impure religion. His lengthy quotation from Isaiah closes the section, which is freely sprinkled with biblical warrants on which his argument rests ("on the authority of inspired wisdom").[37]

What seems even worse for Douglass--the American Church could stop slavery! Douglass is at this point clearly shifting the attention regarding the role of the Church. He is responding to criticism about the Church and about his criticism of the Church: "In prosecuting the anti-slavery enterprise, we have been asked to spare the church, to spare the ministry."[38] But he will not spare a church so derelict in its duty that it had on one Sunday in 1850 set aside the day for sermons praising the Fugitive Slave Law and condemning the so-called "higher-law doctrine" (that God ought to be obeyed rather than men). Douglass here two years later is naming opressing Divines, yet he also acknowledges those who are helping the anti-slavery movement.

Douglass argues that the situation is different in England. There the anti-slavery movement was aided by the Church. Douglass had made trips to the British Isles which had enjoyed great success, and opposition encountered there was aroused by American clergymen (whom he names, generically, in the July 5th address). Douglass had also visited the British West Indies, where the celebration of the anniversary of emancipation (aided by England and the Church) supercedes that of the celebration of the anniversary of independence.[39]

The indictment brought thus far in this section of the speech by Douglass is nearly complete. He has named several American entities ("American christianity," "American justice," "American theology," "American church," "American institutions"). All these terms are collectives; the grammar is for

the most part in the third person. Douglass does not confront his audience en masse while arguing the failings of selected entities of American religion. In the next section, however, the grammar changes. He employs personal pronouns and adjectives[40] to link Americans to their guilty politics, something he can address directly with the audience. This brief protion bridges the previous portion on American religion to the closing portion on the Constitution, which begins a conclusion grounded in hope. Yet, before that (hope) can begin, Douglass here presses home to the hearts of all his audience the collective disparity between what they profess and what they practice. This is a sweeping collection of evidence, drawn from the patriotic and religious categories addressed from the very beginning of the speech until now. The concluding paragraph of this bridge section crams more second person plurals as it moves toward a climax:

> Fellow-citizens, I will not enlarge further on your national inconsistencies. The existence of slavery in this country brands your republicanism as a sham, your humanity as a base of pretense, and your Christianity as a lie. It destroys your moral power abroad: it corrups your politicians at home. It saps the foundation of religion; it makes your name a hissing and a bye-word to a mocking earth. It is the antagonistic force in your government, the only thing that seriously disturbs and endangers your Union. It fetters your progress; it is the enemy of improvement; the deadly foe of education; it fosters pride; it breeds insolence; it promotes vice; it shelters crime; it is a curse to the earth that supports it; and yet you cling to it as if it were the sheet anchor of all your hopes. Oh! be warned! be warned! a horrible reptile is coiled up in your nation's bosom; the venomous creature is nursing at the tender breast of your youthful republic; for the love of God, tear away, and fling from you the hideous monster, and let the weight of twenty millions crush and destroy it forever![41]

The original danger for the ship of state could only be avoided by clinging to the principle of the Declaration of Independence (see above p. 8). But what the nation has actually been clinging to is now revealed as a deadly enemy which needs flinging away. Douglass has been shifting attention for his audience in his effort to convince them that they have been clinging to the

wrong thing! And he turns from condemning enemy to warning friend upon the concern for union.

The issue of the Constitution was a familiar one to Abolitionists. Prior to 1850 Douglass had always been a Garrisonian, accepting the Constitution as a pro-slavery document, thereby concluding that no cooperation with government would further the anti-slavery cause. Around 1850, however, Douglass began to take the position that a strict, literal interpretation of the Constitution found no mention of slavery at all. Therefore, he concluded that the silence of the Constitution cannot be used to support slavery. Moreover, the Constitution should be read as a liberty document. Douglass argues in this July 4th speech that the silence of the Constitution supports liberty, the same as the fathers supported. Douglass further argues that every American citizen has the right to interpret the Constitution, that the constitutionality of slavery is a question for the people. Indeed, this Constitution can prove to be a force of unity in the North ("Fellow citizens!"):

> I hold that every American citizen has a right to form an opinion of the constitution, and to propagate that opinion, and to use all honorable means to make his opinion the prevailing one. Without this right, the liberty of an American citizen would be as insecure as that of a Frenchman. Ex-Vice-President Dallas tells us that the constitution is an object to which no American mind can be too attentive, and no American heart too devoted.[42]

Douglass thus concludes the speech where he began--with hope. He began in hope for the forward progression of a youthful nation; he continues with a hope that was needed (for there were "clouds on the horizon"). He ends with hope, his optimism for the eventual downfall of slavery. This is the first strong expression of positive emotion with which Douglass has identified himself; hope in the beginning of the speech was merely required.[43] The hope is not in today's celebration (premature and in ignorance of past reality and present problems) but in the Declaration of Independence and the genius of

American institutions (which he has soundly condemned for their peculiar support of slavery and their abandoning of the genius of the principles of liberty). However, the very peculiarity of American slavery (peculiar in the light of America's open condemnation of foreign slave trade) is the key to hope. New technology is shrinking the globe, and America will not be able to remain isolated. World pressure will bring force for the end of slavery.

The concluding poem (by Garrison, indicating perhaps broader unity in this hope) brings to an invocation this hope--in God, who is not through yet. It calls on all to pray for the coming Jubilee. Clearly the idea of a forward look (to emancipation), not a backward look (to independence) is in view. The call is to keep fighting. Jubilee in scripture (Lev. 25) was a time for release of slaves and debts. Its inevitable coming placed responsibilities on the present (not to cheat in anticipation of it) and fostered hope for the future. Furthermore, the grammar of the poem is clearly future, for every verb phrase is in future tense.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that Frederick Douglass's strategy in the July 5, 1852, speech was to shift the attention of his audience from a national celebration of joy to a time of national mourning for slavery. We saw him contrast apparent with real regarding the backward look to the historical past. We saw him almost literally take his audience on an audio-visual tour of the present condition of the slaves. And we saw Douglass shift attention from a regional problem of slavery to a national disgrace with the Fugitive Slave Law and the complicity of the Church. He further argued in response to controversial issues regarding Church and Constitution, shifting the attention to the Church's promoting of slavery, especially in light of the role she could play in stopping slavery. The Constitution was viewed as an anti-slavery (liberty) document, one that can rightfully be interpreted by every person, thereby diffusing its threat as a force against the North. Douglass has shifted attention away from the celebration of the occasion in such a way as to subsume the original issues. He has offered a new view, a synopsis that subordinates previous positions.[46]

Douglass's strategy of shifting attention to the harsh realities of slavery by heavy use of motivational appeals to human compassion for suffering (slaves as victims) and the consequent blame and responsibility on the oppressors (at worst) and observers (at least) shows the moral dimensions in which Douglass casts this problem of slavery. The "success" he seemed to reap as orator and the force he appeared to wield as a spokesman for the cause cannot be separated from the initial credibility he brought to the speech as a former slave, one who continued to suffer in many respects (without even his own freedom or that of his family, until his purchased emancipation by

friends; mistreated and discriminated against throughout his travels as speaker). It seems to me that this initial credibility and his strategies in this speech, many of which point to a role as "witness" to moral "evils," should result in increased derived credibility. Even so, some of his arguments might "strike nerves" or "ruffle feathers" (as did the prophetic personae he chose to draw upon--Isaiah, John the Baptist, Jesus). Douglass's story "rang true" at the most fundamental levels of the human condition. His was testimony incarnate to the humanity of the Negro. His moral argumentation precipitated moral crisis in the minds of his hearers. Is, perhaps, "public moral argument" at its productive best when the expertise and experience of the speaker is not far removed from the existential pulse of the problem and its actual and potential sufferers? In this light, speech "success" is closely linked to the ability to capture "timeless" humanitarian appeals and to block attempts to falsely compartmentalize problems into historic or regional pigeon holes.

If the attention-shift provides insight into the inner workings of this particular discourse, of what use is that for rhetorical studies? One answer might be that the attention-shift becomes a paradigm of what is possible in a discourse. Then such a paradigm could serve as an exemplary case which functions as a standard of evaluation, allowing the critic to see what a discourse can and ought to do, and to be able to judge other discourses which might be similar. The attention-shift seems, then, to function as a genre of rhetorical strategy, perhaps similar to a strategy of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount ("You have heard it said..., but I say unto you...."). If I am correct about this genre of strategy, it means that further work remains in order to test such a generic paradigm for its applications.[45]

My task has been to explore the workings of this particular discourse through close textual analysis. If a better understanding of the workings of the discourse comes about by allowing the attention-shift paradigm to arise and survive, then a contribution toward theory is made. I believe the attention-shift model has been useful here and perhaps should be permitted to "be fruitful and multiply."

ENDNOTES

[1]Michael Leff, "Textual Criticism: The Legacy of G. P. Mohrmann," Quarterly Journal of Speech 72 (November, 1986): 377-89.

[2]Ibid., p. 378.

[3]William R. Brown, "Attention and the Rhetoric of Social Intervention," Quarterly Journal of Speech 68 (February, 1982):17-27.

[4]Ibid., p. 18.

[5]Ibid.

[6]"Anti-slavery" is the term frequently used by Abolitionists themselves in reference to their cause.

[7]Philip S. Foner, ed., The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass (New York: International Publishers, 1950), II:140.

[8]Ibid., II:28.

[9]Ch. Perelman, "The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning," in Great Ideas Today (Chicago: Encyclopedia Brittanica, 1970), pp. 418-19.

[10]Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1971), p. 416.

[11]Perelman, in Great Ideas, pp. 418-19.

[12]Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 416.

[13]Ibid., p. 413.

[14]Ch. Perelman, "Le reel commun et le reel philosophique" in Etudes sur l'histoire de la philosophie, en hommage a Martial Gueroult (Paris: Fischbacher, 1964), pp. 127-38, cited in Perelman, in Great Ideas, p. 418.

[15]24, as compared to 3 second person pronouns; the following section contains 16, as compared to just 4 first person pronouns.

[16]Foner, II:185. All subsequent citations from the July 5, 1852, speech (Foner, II:181-204) will be abbreviated TEXT.

[17]TEXT, p. 185.

[18]TEXT, p. 188.

[20]TEXT, p. 188 (emphasis in original).

[21]This biblical analogy continues a thread taken up earlier by Douglass as he likens America not to New Testament (hypocritical) Israel but to Old Testament (blind) Pharaoh and Egypt, who together plunged blindly into the Red Sea. Neither the present analogy nor its precursor is complimentary! The apparently proud and powerful are in reality impotent and empty.

[22]Psalm 137, paraphrased by Douglass.

[23]TEXT, p. 189 (emphasis in original).

[24]Foner, I:59.

[25]Ibid.

[26]125 pages long, with introductions by William Garrison and Wendell Phillips, translated into French and German. It saw 11,000 copies published in the U. S. by 1848, and went through 9 editions in Great Britain.

[27]Foner, I:59-61; see also Gerald Fulkerson, "Exile as Emergence: Frederick Douglass in Great Britain, 1845-47," Quarterly Journal of Speech 60 (February, 1974):69.

[28]TEXT, p. 190.

[29]TEXT, p. 199 (emphasis in original).

[30]TEXT, p. 192 (emphasis is mine).

[31]TEXT, pp. 194-95 (emphasis is mine).

[32]TEXT, p. 195 (emphasis in original).

[33]TEXT, p. 196 (emphasis in original).

[34]Matthew 23:23.

[35]TEXT, p. 197 (emphasis in original). The vital "principle" which I have discussed above (pp. 7-9) is made explicit here by Douglass as a principle of religious liberty which, for Douglass means that those who are free from oppression are then obligated (free) to be actively benevolent toward the oppressed.

[36]TEXT, p. 197. Note the allusion to the introduction--"flinty rocks" (or danger for the ship of state); see above, p. 8.

[37]TEXT, p. 198.

[38]TEXT, p. 198.

[39]Fulkerson, p. 73.

[40]<u>36</u> second person plurals in one single page of text.

[41]TEXT, p. 201.

[42]TEXT, p. 202.

[43]Douglass, in the fourth paragraph of the speech, the virtual beginning of the "message," begins with present day (July 4th). All identifying descriptions of the day are in second person. The only identification Douglass makes with the day (using "I") are his feelings of gladness about their nation. All previous positive emotions throughout the speech are identified with second or third person, seldom first person pronouns.

[44]Edwin Black, Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 155-59.

[45]Lett, pp. 382-83.